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Twenty-fourth semi-annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)

I. Background

1. The present report is my twenty-fourth semi-annual report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). It provides a review and an assessment of the implementation of the resolution since my previous report on the subject, dated 22 April 2016 (S/2016/366). I note the continued lack of progress on key provisions of the resolution and highlight concerns about ongoing pressure on the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Lebanon.

2. The month of May marked the two-year anniversary of the vacancy in the presidency of Lebanon and, as at the time of writing, the position had yet to be filled. Attempts at resolving the situation have thus far not led to any breakthrough. The vacuum at the top level of the State institution has begun to affect other political decision-making forums, including the Cabinet, triggering concerns of further institutional paralysis. In that context, the Prime Minister, Tammam Salam, led the work of the Government in the face of adverse circumstances. While the boycott of parliamentary sessions by the Free Patriotic Movement and Hizbullah continued, the parliamentary dialogue under the auspices of the Speaker, Nabih Berri, held four sessions, all of which included discussions on the presidency, and the dialogue between the Future Movement and Hizbullah was maintained.

3. The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to have an impact on the security and stability of Lebanon and attacks occurred during the reporting period, in Qa' and Kasarah. In September, a Lebanese military court indicted two Syrian intelligence officers for their alleged involvement in an attack against two Sunni mosques in Tripoli in August 2013.

4. The Lebanese Armed Forces proactively pre-empted, prevented and responded to threats to the stability and security of Lebanon, including on the outskirts of the town of Arsal, where armed clashes with extremist militants continued to occur. In terms of overall security, an explosion took place on 12 June at a bank in Beirut. Beginning on 24 July, some 60 Palestinian individuals suspected of terrorist and criminal acts from the Palestine refugee camp of Ein El Helweh surrendered to the Lebanese authorities.

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5. The number of registered refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic remained stable at slightly more than 1 million. The number of Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic fell to some 30,000 as at August 2016. As at the same date, $1.22 billion had been disbursed or committed to be disbursed in 2016, and $344 million carried over from 2015. These contributions included $979 million provided to United Nations system agencies and non-governmental organizations in support of activities under the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, representing 39 per cent of the funding requested. In addition, $140 million was pledged to the Concessional Financing Facility for the Middle East and North Africa. There were concerns during the reporting period that refugees might be the object of retaliatory attacks, particularly in the aftermath of the suicide bombing in Qa', but such attacks did not materialize.

6. Lebanon participated in the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants, held on 19 September, at which Member States adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1). At that forum, the Prime Minister stated that the refugee crisis posed serious problems for the country's stability, security, economy and public services. He emphasized that Lebanon could not cope with that "existential challenge" alone and that, barring a massive international effort, it risked collapsing. He also attended the Leaders' Summit on the Global Refugee Crisis, held on the margins of the General Assembly on 20 September, under the auspices of the United States of America, Canada, Ethiopia, Germany, Jordan, Mexico and Sweden.

II. Implementation of resolution 1559 (2004)

7. Since the adoption of resolution 1559 (2004) on 2 September 2004, several of its provisions have been implemented, as I highlighted in my previous reports. Presidential and parliamentary elections were conducted freely and fairly in 2008 and 2009. The Syrian Arab Republic withdrew its troops and military assets from Lebanon in April 2005. Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic established full diplomatic relations in 2009.

8. During the reporting period, the Prime Minister continued to affirm the respect of Lebanon for all United Nations resolutions. The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and its impact on Lebanon, however, have limited progress in the implementation of the outstanding provisions of resolution 1559 (2004) and other resolutions pertaining to Lebanon.

9. The delineation of the Syrian-Lebanese border, which was strongly encouraged by the Security Council in its resolution 1680 (2006), is still pending. Moreover, the existence and activities of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias along the border remain a threat to the stability of the country and the region. The Lebanese Armed Forces still have three regiments deployed on the eastern border. The capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces in that vulnerable border area have increased steadily, playing therefore an essential role in defending the country's stability at its front lines. It remains essential that the Lebanese State achieve a full monopoly on the possession of weapons and the use of force throughout Lebanon. Continued support from the international community in that regard remains a priority.

A. Sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon

10. With the adoption of resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council aimed at strengthening the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout the country, in line with the Taif Accords of 1989, to which all the political parties in Lebanon had committed themselves. That objective has remained the highest priority of my efforts to facilitate the implementation of all resolutions pertaining to Lebanon.

11. The presidency has remained vacant for two years and almost five months. In their press statement of 24 May and the presidential statement of 22 July (S/PRST/2016/10), Council members underlined in the strongest possible terms their concern over the prolonged vacancy, which had impaired the ability of Lebanon to address the growing security, economic, social and humanitarian challenges facing the country. Similarly, in his speech to the General Assembly on 22 September, the Prime Minister acknowledged that the vacuum had "led to a quasi-paralysis of the legislative authority", slowed down the work of the executive and had "negative repercussions on the economic situation".

12. Since its session of 21 June, the parliamentary dialogue, spearheaded by the Speaker, has considered the idea of a "package deal" that would seek to address most outstanding issues, including the presidency, the premiership and the electoral law, but has failed to garner consensus to date. In its session of 2 to 4 August, the parliamentary dialogue discussed the formation of a senate and the implementation of decentralization. On 5 September, the Speaker suspended the dialogue's sessions. The parliament held no sessions, further to the boycott by Hizbullah and the Free Patriotic Movement. The Prime Minister demonstrated strong leadership and persistence in leading the Cabinet at a time when its efficiency has been affected adversely by the lack of agreement by ministers on outstanding issues and by announcements of resignations or the suspension of participation in meetings, both of which have hindered its ability to make decisions on issues of daily importance to Lebanese citizens.

13. On 25 August, the Free Patriotic Movement began a boycott of Cabinet sessions in protest against the extension of the terms of senior military officials, threatening to resort to street protests with the stated goal of overthrowing the Government if its demands were not met. This came in the context of the expected extension of the term of Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces, General Jean Kahwaji, for one year, which occurred on 30 September. Against that backdrop, Lebanese politicians have expressed continuous concern at the viability and limited efficiency of the Cabinet. The Cabinet has sought to reach an agreement on the State budget, unsuccessfully to date. Discussions on a new electoral law for the parliamentary elections scheduled to be held in May 2017 have not led to an agreement thus far.

14. The dialogue between the Future Movement and Hizbullah continued. On 19 July, in the aftermath of the attack on Qa', interlocutors in the forum stressed their support for the Lebanese army and security apparatuses in their efforts to combat terrorism and strongly condemned all forms of terrorist acts. On

20 September, they discussed the crisis of the presidency, the Government and the parliament, and its consequences for the country's stability, after the parliamentary dialogue had been suspended.

15. On 2 September, two Syrian intelligence officers were indicted by a Lebanese military court for their alleged involvement in the twin suicide bombings against two Sunni mosques in Tripoli on 23 August 2013 (see S/2013/612) that left 40 people dead and scores injured. Five Lebanese nationals were also arrested in relation to the attack. Several peaceful demonstrations were held on 9 September in Tripoli against alleged Syrian involvement in the bombing and against two Syrian-affiliated Lebanese political groups, the Arab Democratic Party and a faction of the Islamic Unification Movement.

16. In its resolution 1680 (2006), the Security Council strongly encouraged the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to respond positively to the request of the Government of Lebanon to delineate their common border. I continue to call upon the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon to achieve the full delineation of their common border. Given the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, however, progress has been even more difficult to achieve and no tangible steps were taken by either side in that regard during the reporting period.

17. The delineation and demarcation of the boundaries of Lebanon remain key elements to guaranteeing national sovereignty and territorial integrity. They are also critical to facilitating proper border control. The complex security situation along the Syrian-Lebanese border in the current circumstances, including persistent reports of cross-border fighting and movements of arms and people, further underlines the urgency of demarcating the border. While acknowledging the bilateral nature of border delineation, progress on the matter remains an obligation of the two countries, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 1680 (2006) and 1559 (2004).

18. Cross-border violations of Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity have continued on the eastern and northern borders as a direct result of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. During the reporting period, there were reports of 18 cross-border shooting incidents and eight incidents of shelling.

19. The ongoing occupation by Israel of the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line stands in violation of the sovereignty of Lebanon and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). I continue to call for the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from the area.

20. There was no progress in relation to the issue of the Shab'a Farms area during the reporting period. Neither the Syrian Arab Republic nor Israel has yet responded with regard to the provisional definition of the area contained in my report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), issued on 30 October 2007 (S/2007/641). I will provide an update on developments on the ground in the Shab'a Farms area in my upcoming report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

21. Unmanned aerial vehicles and fixed-wing aircraft, including fighter jets, of the Israel Defense Forces persisted in conducting almost daily overflights of Lebanon during the reporting period, in violation of Lebanese sovereignty and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). The Government of Lebanon has regularly and

repeatedly protested against the violations. I have deplored them and demanded that they cease immediately.

B. Extension of control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory

22. The Government of Lebanon has reiterated to the United Nations its intention to extend State authority over all Lebanese territory, as called for in the Taif Accords and in resolution 1559 (2004). The Lebanese Armed Forces and the internal security forces have played a crucial role in implementing that commitment under difficult circumstances in which the ability of the Lebanese State to fully exercise its authority over all its territory continues to be challenged.

23. Concern remains at the involvement of Lebanese fighters, including members of Hizbullah, in the Syrian conflict. The movement has continued to publicly acknowledge its participation in the fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic, most recently in a speech on 24 June, in which its Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, stated that it was fighting in Aleppo. He said that it was not possible to separate Lebanon from developments in the region, in particular the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, in blatant disregard of the commitment by Hizbullah to the Baabda Declaration and the Lebanese policy of disassociation. Other Lebanese nationals have participated in the fighting across the border in the Syrian Arab Republic alongside Syrian opposition forces, the former Nusrah Front and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The involvement of Hizbullah and other Lebanese elements in the fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic seriously jeopardizes the stability and security of Lebanon.

24. The two successive attacks that struck the village of Qa' on 27 June brought to renewed attention the persistent risks to the security and stability of Lebanon as a result of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and triggered concerns about the risk of sectarian tensions. In a first attack in the early morning of 27 June, four suicide bombers killed 5 people and injured 19 others, including 4 Lebanese soldiers. The Lebanese Armed Forces deployed heavily, cordoned off the area and launched a search operation. Later that day, four other suicide bombers detonated charges in the same village, causing no fatalities, but slight injuries to 13 individuals. There was no claim of responsibility for either attack. In the aftermath of the attack, Hizbullah reportedly set up its own checkpoints and dispatched its so-called "resistance brigades". Although Qa' may not have been the originally intended target of the attackers, this was the first attack in a Christian village in Lebanon since the beginning of the Syrian conflict and it triggered calls by some in the Christian community to take up arms in self-defence. Immediately after the attack, the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Prime Minister publicly asked residents to refrain from "chaotic self-defence". Following the attacks, several hundred Syrian men and a smaller number of Lebanese nationals were arrested throughout the country during security operations. Most Syrian nationals were arrested for illegal stay and released shortly thereafter. In addition, fears surfaced that retaliatory attacks against Syrian refugees from among Lebanese communities could occur, but ultimately did not. The Minister of the Interior, Nohad Machnouq, stated that the attackers had not come from among the Syrian refugees located in the vicinity. On

14 July, the State Commissioner to the Military Court charged three suspects over their involvement in the attack.

25. On 31 August, a roadside bomb exploded near the Biqa' town of Zahlah, killing a woman and lightly injuring 11 other people. There was no claim of responsibility. On 22 September, the Lebanese Military Prosecutor indicted 12 individuals in connection with the attack, five of whom were already in custody. The Speaker stated the day after the attack that it had been aimed at supporters from his Amal movement who were being transported to a commemoration nearby.

26. The Lebanese Armed Forces continued operations against extremist armed militants in eastern Lebanon, in particular around the town of Arsal. On 23 June, heavy clashes took place between ISIL and the former Nusrah Front after the army destroyed a vehicle carrying extremist militants, killing a number of them and injuring others. From 13 to 16 July, intense clashes took place between the Lebanese Armed Forces and extremist elements, during which the army used heavy artillery and rocket launchers, inflicting casualties among the militants. On 4 August, the Lebanese Armed Forces intensified operations on the outskirts of Arsal, including by raiding an alleged hideout of ISIL there that resulted in the killing of an alleged ISIL member and the arrest of two others, wanted on suspicion of involvement in rigging cars used in attacks in Lebanon in 2013 and 2014. A number of Syrian refugees were arrested in raids as the army undertook widespread search operations in the area of Mashari' al-Qa'. On 11 and 14 August, the Lebanese Armed Forces used heavy artillery to target militants on the outskirts of Arsal, R'as Ba'albak and Qa'. On 15 August, a roadside bomb targeted a Lebanese Armed Forces vehicle outside Arsal, lightly wounding five soldiers, and stressing the direct threats that security and army personnel still face. Hizbullah also reportedly clashed with extremist elements during the reporting period in the vicinity of Arsal and on the outskirts of Qa'. On 23 July, one of the recently elected representatives of Arsal escaped an assassination attempt, and an explosive device found near his home was dismantled on 21 August. On 17 May, a military judge sentenced 106 men to death for belonging to terrorist organizations, attacking the town of Arsal and kidnapping and attempting to kill Lebanese soldiers and police officers.

27. Security plans continued to be implemented by the national and security forces in the towns of Arsal and Tripoli, the Biqa' and southern Beirut, and the political consensus supporting their implementation was maintained. Nine members of the personnel from the Lebanese security forces abducted in August 2014 remained detained.

28. Efforts by the international community to build the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces made continuous and sustained progress. During the reporting period, these included an increase in bilateral assistance from the United States through the delivery of equipment worth more than $50 million to the Lebanese Armed Forces, the continuation of the border observation posts project by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Canada, and the delivery of 14 million euros by the European Union for the integrated border management programme, in addition to continued assistance by other Member States for strengthening the border capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

29. Reports of arms smuggling and cross-border incidents continued, which the United Nations has no means of verifying independently. This highlights the continued importance of improving the capacity of the security forces to manage and control the border effectively so as to prevent armed groups and militias in Lebanon from expanding their arsenals.

C. Disbanding and disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias

30. In its resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council called for the disarming and disbanding of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, a key provision of the resolution that has not yet been implemented. It reflects and reaffirms a decision to which all Lebanese committed themselves in the Taif Accords, which led at the time to Lebanese militias, with the exception of Hizbullah, relinquishing their weapons. Given the current national context, and the impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon, it is critical that such commitments be upheld and implemented by all in order to avoid the spectre of a renewed confrontation among the Lebanese and to strengthen the institutions of the State.

31. Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias within the country continue to operate outside the control of the Government, in serious violation of resolution 1559 (2004). While several groups across the political spectrum in Lebanon possess weapons outside government control, the armed component of Hizbullah is the most significant and most heavily armed Lebanese militia in the country. The maintenance of arms by Hizbullah and other groups poses a serious challenge to the State's ability to exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory. In addition, several Palestinian armed groups continue to operate in the country inside and outside the refugee camps.

32. There has been no tangible progress towards the disbanding and disarming of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, as called for in the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004). Since the adoption of that resolution, no practical steps have been taken to tackle that crucial issue, which lies at the heart of the sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon. Several Lebanese political parties and individuals continue to speak up against the maintenance by Hizbullah of a military arsenal, which they consider to be a destabilizing factor in the country and one that undermines democracy.

33. I have repeatedly expressed my deep concern to Lebanese leaders about the serious risks that armed groups pose to the stability of the country and the region. I have urged them to tackle the matter without further delay, given that it is their obligation under Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). In a democratic State, it is a fundamental anomaly that a political party maintains its own militia. Nonetheless, Hizbullah has continued to claim openly that its military capacity is separate from that of the Lebanese State and that its arms serve as a deterrent against potential aggression from Israel.

34. The National Dialogue had previously played a key role in seeking to address the disarmament of armed groups, including by discussing a proposed national defence strategy. There have been no sessions of the National Dialogue held since 2014, however, another adverse effect of the presidential vacuum.

35. On 12 June, an explosion took place at the BLOM bank in central Beirut, causing two minor injuries. There was no claim of responsibility. The Prime Minister qualified the attack as a terrorist crime aimed at hitting economic stability and threatening the national security of Lebanon, given that the banking sector was one of the main pillars of the State in the light of the paralysis of the country's institutions. The incident occurred during the national debate over measures of compliance with the Hizbullah International Financing Prevention Act, implemented by Lebanese banks. Against that backdrop, in a speech on 24 June, the Secretary-General of Hizbullah stated that Hizbullah rejected that law but was not affected by it, given that its budget, salaries, expenses, weapons and arsenal were all provided by the Islamic Republic of Iran, as were the rockets with which it "threatened Israel". This demonstrates yet again that Hizbullah maintains unauthorized weapons outside the control of the State. Referencing these statements in a letter dated 5 July addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2016/593), the Permanent Representative of Israel called upon the Security Council to condemn the Islamic Republic of Iran for its "destabilizing role in the region" and to demand that it comply with resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1559 (2004) and "stop transferring weapons to terrorist organizations".

36. At its summit held in Nouakchott in July and its meeting held in Cairo on 8 September, the League of Arab States condemned the alleged activities of "terrorist Hizbullah" in Bahrain. Lebanon expressed reservations to the qualification of Hizbullah as terrorist. In a letter dated 16 August addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2016/717), the Permanent Representative of Israel called for condemnation of the "dangerously destabilizing activities" of Hizbullah further to its alleging "direct involvement in developing a terrorist infrastructure in the West Bank and Gaza", including by recruiting, training and financing operatives to carry out attacks against Israelis in Israel and in the region.

37. On 11 July, the Appeals Chamber of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon found that sufficient evidence had been adduced to establish the death of Mustafa Badreddine, a Hizbullah leader indicted by the Tribunal for the assassination of Rafiq Hariri. Badreddine was killed on 12 May in the Syrian Arab Republic.

38. Humanitarian conditions for Palestine refugees in Lebanon remained dire. The total number of Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic was approximately 30,000, a notable decrease from the previous reporting period resulting from the departure of some 10,000 of the refugees for third countries. On 25 August, the Lebanese Cabinet agreed to conduct a census of Palestine refugees in Lebanon. The United Nations has continued to urge the Lebanese authorities to improve the living conditions of the refugees. Those efforts should be undertaken without prejudice to the eventual resolution of the Palestine refugee question in the context of a comprehensive peace agreement in the region.

39. The situation in the Palestine refugee camp of Ein El Helweh grew tense during the reporting period. In an incident on 19 July, a Fatah supporter was shot dead and two others, including a child, were wounded. On 21 July, an alleged affiliate of the Islamic Bilal Badr group was shot and injured in the camp. On 26 July, the Lebanese Armed Forces reported having thwarted plans by ISIL and the former Nusrah Front to perpetrate terrorist attacks inside and outside the camp, including in Sidon and

Beirut. The next day, the Minister of the Interior stated that the situation in the camp was under control. Divisions between and within the Palestinian factions active inside the camp also persisted, leading to a number of attacks and retaliations. Nevertheless, the cooperation between the Lebanese authorities and Palestinian representatives, including through close coordination with the joint Palestinian security forces, to maintain security in the camps remained effective. This was exemplified by the surrender, beginning on 24 July, of up to 60 individuals suspected of having perpetrated terrorist and criminal acts, a number of whom were reportedly affiliated with Jund al-Sham, Sheikh Ahmad al-Assir and the Hizbullah-affiliated so-called "resistance brigades". The radical Islamist group calling itself "Shabab al-Muslim" also announced that it had disbanded. On 19 September, Palestinian factions in the northern refugee camp of Beddawi handed over two Palestinians allegedly involved in an earlier armed clash in the camp. Also on 19 September, a Palestinian man suspected of being a Lebanese Armed Forces informant and of having contributed to the surrenders was shot dead. On 23 September, the Lebanese Armed Forces reported having arrested a suspected leader of ISIL in the Ein El Helweh camp, Imad Yassin, adding that he had been "planning several terrorist bombings against military posts, vital and touristic facilities, commercial markets, popular gatherings and residential areas in more than one Lebanese region commissioned and aided by terrorist organizations outside the country".

40. The presence of Palestinian armed groups outside the camps continues to challenge the ability of Lebanon to exercise full sovereignty over its territory. Notwithstanding the decision taken in 2006 by the National Dialogue and confirmed in subsequent sessions, no progress was made during the reporting period with regard to dismantling the military bases of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada in the country. All but one of the bases are located along the Syrian-Lebanese border. Their presence has been undermining Lebanese sovereignty and governmental authority and makes the delineation of the border more difficult. It poses a serious challenge to the effective control of the eastern border between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. I have reiterated my calls upon the Lebanese authorities for the implementation of earlier decisions of the National Dialogue, specifically those relating to the dismantling of the above-mentioned military bases, and upon the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to cooperate with those efforts in good faith.

III. Observations

41. I continue to be disappointed at the lack of further tangible progress in the implementation of the remaining provisions of resolution 1559 (2004), including the election of a president. Lebanon still faces challenges to its stability and security, both internally and along its borders with the Syrian Arab Republic, including from terrorist and extremist groups and arms smuggling. I am concerned that the persistent stagnation in the implementation of the resolution could lead to the erosion of provisions already implemented and contribute to a further fragility of State institutions and a deterioration of stability in Lebanon. I reiterate my firm conviction that it is in the best interest of Lebanon and the Lebanese people to make progress towards the full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) for the long-term stability of the country and the region.

42. The international community has repeatedly called for Lebanese politicians to elect a Head of State. It has now been 27 months since that position fell vacant, preventing important decisions from being made as the country faces pressing political, economic, social and humanitarian issues. I commend the Prime Minister on his extraordinary leadership and wisdom in guiding the country in very difficult times and allowing the Cabinet to continue to make decisions on a limited number of issues. Nevertheless, the Cabinet cannot be expected to fulfil the functions of the presidency and it is troubling that the vacuum is increasingly affecting the proper functioning of other institutions.

43. I reiterate the calls made by the Security Council and the international community upon Lebanese leaders to act responsibly in the face of the mounting institutional crisis and to attend parliamentary sessions to elect a president. I call upon them to refrain from using inflammatory rhetoric and paralysing decision-making for political gain, including given the potential impact of such tactics on sectarian relations in the country. I urge them to work together in a spirit of compromise and in the national interest as the only way forward.

44. I note the Speaker's efforts at developing a sequenced and multi-pronged formula agreeable to Lebanese decision makers, under the auspices of the parliamentary dialogue. This forum is important for fostering consensus among all concerned. The dialogue between the Future Movement and Hizbullah similarly contributes to preventing sectarian tensions and maintaining consensus in support of security and stability throughout the country. At the same time, it is equally important that the parliament be restored in its representative, legislative and oversight functions. Building on the successful municipal elections in May, and as the parliament's term expires in May 2017, I encourage all concerned to work together to ensure the timely holding of the legislative elections as an essential step in the country's democratic process.

45. I remain concerned that, in the absence of a president, the National Dialogue did not hold meetings, including about the disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese groups, and earlier decisions therefore could not be taken forward. The essential role of the president in convening, steering forward and following up on decisions of the National Dialogue is yet another reminder of the importance of filling that function as a matter of urgency.

46. I am deeply concerned by the claims by Hizbullah that it receives its funding, weapons and arsenal from the Islamic Republic of Iran, in clear violation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). This demonstrates that Hizbullah maintains a paramilitary capacity outside the authority of the State. I call upon countries in the region that maintain close ties with Hizbullah to encourage the transformation of the armed group into a solely political party and its disarmament, in accordance with the requirements of the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004), in the best interests of Lebanon and regional peace and security.

47. The widespread proliferation of weapons outside the control of the State, combined with the existence of heavily armed militias, undermines the security of Lebanese citizens. The maintenance by Hizbullah of sizeable and sophisticated military capabilities outside the control of the Government of Lebanon remains a matter of grave concern, in particular because it creates an atmosphere of

intimidation and represents a key challenge to the safety of Lebanese civilians and to the government monopoly on the legitimate use of force. I reiterate my call upon Hizbullah and all other parties concerned not to engage in any militant activity inside or outside Lebanon, consistent with the requirements of the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004).

48. I continue to urge the Government and armed forces of Lebanon to take all measures necessary to prohibit Hizbullah and other armed groups from acquiring weapons and building paramilitary capacity outside the authority of the State, in violation of resolution 1559 (2004). The discussion paper on a national defence strategy, developed in the context of the National Dialogue remains a valuable starting point in that regard.

49. I have repeatedly condemned the continued violation of the sovereignty of Lebanon, including cross-border incidents that continue to threaten the country's stability because of the actions of warring parties in the Syrian Arab Republic. I continue to call upon all parties, including the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1559 (2004).

50. The participation of Lebanese citizens in the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic is a breach of the policy of disassociation and the principles of the Baabda Declaration, which was agreed upon by all Lebanese parties in June 2012. The involvement of Hizbullah and other Lebanese elements in the fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic seriously jeopardizes the security and stability of Lebanon. I remain deeply concerned about the continuing threat to Lebanon posed by terrorism and extremism, including from groups such as ISIL and the former Nusrah Front. I am concerned by reports of the involvement of Hizbullah and other Lebanese elements in fighting elsewhere in the region, which risks exposing Lebanon to even greater security threats.

51. I commend the Lebanese security and armed forces on their continuous efforts to prevent and respond to challenges to the country's security and stability. The bombing in Qa' and the attack in Kasarah demonstrate the persistent threats that Lebanon faces as a result of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. Against that backdrop, the proactive deployment of specialized regiments of the Lebanese Armed Forces at the border with the Syrian Arab Republic furthers efforts at fostering a sense of security among communities there. I welcome the progress made in deploying capacity along the largest section of the border to date, with the support of bilateral donors. I appreciate the continuous support by donors to building the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces and call for that assistance to be sustained and further strengthened. I reiterate my condemnation of the continued detention of Lebanese soldiers and security forces personnel held captive by the former Nusrah Front and ISIL in the eastern border area between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic and call for their immediate release.

52. I regret the absence of any progress on the delineation and demarcation of the border with the Syrian Arab Republic. I reiterate my view that integrated border management will, in the longer term, contribute significantly to better control of the borders of Lebanon and help to prevent the illegal transfer of weapons and fighters

in both directions, which has become even more pressing in the context of events in the Syrian Arab Republic.

53. I welcome the cooperation between the various security services in the country, which has been sustained and has led to successes in preventing attacks and to a number of arrests of suspected perpetrators of terrorist and criminal acts. These arrests stress the positive impact that the joint action by relevant services has had on the country's ability to bring perpetrators to justice and ensure accountability. Broad political support for the various security operations, including subsequent judicial processes, also sends an important message that impunity for acts of violence will not be tolerated. I note the indictment of suspects in the attacks against two mosques in Tripoli in 2013 and further note with concern their alleged ties to Syrian intelligence services.

54. At a time when the institutional paralysis is deepening and most Lebanese institutions are gradually eroded, it is essential that the political consensus in support of the Lebanese Armed Forces as a national institution rising above confessional affiliations be maintained. I note the extension of the term of the Lebanese Armed Forces Commander and the intermittent boycott of Cabinet sessions by the Free Patriotic Movement in relation thereto. In that context, I call upon Lebanese leaders to continue to shield the Lebanese Armed Forces from political manoeuvring.

55. The situation of Palestine refugees in Lebanon and the limited resources available to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to assist them remains a concern, including in the light of the continued presence, albeit in decreased numbers, of Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic who have fled the violence there. I join my voice to that of the Prime Minister in calling for donors to increase their support for the Agency. I welcome the work of the joint Palestinian security force in contributing to the surrender to the Lebanese authorities of individuals suspected of terrorist and criminal activities from the Ein El Helweh camp. I welcome the renewed commitment of Palestinian leaders to maintaining security and stability in the camps and the surrounding areas.

56. The persistent violations by Israel of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, including the overflights of Lebanese territory by Israeli military aircraft, remain of serious concern. I reiterate my call upon Israel to adhere to its obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions and to withdraw its forces from the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, as well as to cease its overflights of Lebanese airspace, which undermine the credibility of the Lebanese security services and generate anxiety among civilians.

57. I concur with the Prime Minister's concern at the adverse impact of the Syrian crisis on the stability, security, economy and public services of Lebanon. The crisis constitutes not only a major humanitarian and socioeconomic challenge for Lebanon but also a challenge to the country's stability and must be addressed as such. I strongly encourage Member States, including regional donors, to fulfil their burden-sharing responsibilities, as called for by the Prime Minister, by contributing generously through the crisis response plan and the other mechanisms addressed at the Kuwait and London conferences, respectively, including by complementing their

contributions to short-term emergency response with more substantial and predictable multi-year funding for humanitarian, resilience and development activities.

58. I am grateful to Terje Roed-Larsen for his service as my Special Envoy for the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) for the past 12 years. I remain firmly committed to the implementation of this mandate and, in this regard, have requested my Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, to assume these responsibilities.

59. I count on the continued commitment of the Government of Lebanon to its international obligations and call upon all parties and actors to fully abide by resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). I also call upon Member States to renew efforts to support Lebanon in ensuring respect for its obligations under those resolutions as the best way to advance the country's long-term prosperity and stability as a democratic State. The United Nations will continue its efforts towards the full implementation of those and all other resolutions pertaining to Lebanon.